

IN THE CLAIMS:

Non-elected claim 24 is canceled. Claim 1 has been amended herein. All of the pending claims 1 through 23, 25, and 26 are presented below. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings in the application. Please enter these claims as amended.

Listing of the Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A flexible spinal needle assembly having an outside diameter sized so that withdrawal of the flexible spinal needle assembly from dura mater of a spine, subsequent to insertion of said assembly ~~therethrough~~ through the dura mater, permits the dura mater substantially to reseal a space formerly occupied by the flexible spinal needle assembly, said flexible spinal needle assembly comprising: a support needle having a first end defining a non-cutting piercing point, said support needle further comprising a hollow bore with an opening proximate said first end allowing access to said bore; and a flexible needle slidably mounted on a portion of said support needle such that said first end of said support needle protrudes from said flexible needle exposing said non-cutting piercing point and said opening.

2. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 1, wherein said non cutting piercing point comprises a pencil-point tip.

3. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 1, wherein said flexible needle assembly has a tip configured and arranged to provide a feedback signal to indicate dural puncture.

4. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 1, wherein: a rear end of said support needle carries a support hub having a first attach structure; and a proximal end of said flexible needle carries a flexible needle hub having a second attach structure configured to removably attach to the first attach structure carried by said support hub.

5. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 4, wherein the first and second attach structures comprise a LUER-LOCK.RTM. type connection.

6. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 4, wherein said flexible needle hub is configured for substantially unobtrusive attachment to a patient's skin by way of an intermediary adhesive element.

7. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 4, wherein said flexible needle hub is configured for attachment to medical fluid transfer equipment by an attachment structure to form a connection generally perpendicular to a direction of needle insertion.

8. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 1, wherein: a rear end of said support needle carries a support hub; and a proximal end of said flexible needle carries a flexible needle hub having a detach structure configured to detach the flexible needle hub from the support hub.

9. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 1, wherein: a proximal end of said flexible needle carries a flexible needle hub; and a rear end of said support needle carries a support hub having a detach structure configured to detach the flexible needle hub from the support hub.

10. (Previously presented) The flexible needle assembly of claim 1, wherein said flexible needle comprises a conduit formed from a first material and radially reinforced at a distal end by a second material.

11. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 10, wherein said second material is selected from the group comprising a stainless steel wire and a ribbon spring.

12. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 1, wherein said flexible needle comprises a force absorbing structure to prevent kinking when the flexible needle is bent.

13. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 12, wherein said force absorbing structure comprises a ribbon spring.

14. (Previously presented) The flexible needle assembly of claim 12, wherein said force absorbing structure comprises a kink sleeve disposed on a portion thereof.

15. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 1, further comprising a central stylet slidably mounted in said support needle to prevent the entry of matter through said opening proximate said first end.

16. (Previously presented) A flexible spinal needle assembly for inserting a distal end of a flexible spinal needle through dura mater into a spine of a patient, said flexible spinal needle assembly comprising: a support needle having a proximal end and a non-cutting piercing point at a distal end, said support needle configured to resist relative motion between said distal end of said flexible needle and said non-cutting piercing point during insertion of said flexible spinal needle assembly into the patient; wherein said flexible needle is carried exterior to said support needle to expose said non-cutting piercing point when positioned for said inserting.

17. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 16, wherein said flexible needle has an exterior diameter such that withdrawal of said flexible needle from said dura mater, subsequent to insertion of the flexible needle assembly therethrough, permits said dura mater substantially to reseal a space formerly occupied by said flexible needle.

18. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 17, wherein: said proximal end of said support needle carries a support hub having a first attach structure; a proximal end of said flexible needle carries a flexible needle hub having a second attach structure configured to interface in removable interference with said first structure carried by said support hub.

19. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 16, wherein said flexible needle further comprises a radially reinforcing material located at a distal end of said flexible needle, said reinforcing material resisting peel-back of said flexible needle from said support needle.

20. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 16, having a distal end of said assembly being constructed to provide a perceptible feedback signal when said distal end of said flexible needle penetrates said dura mater.

21. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 16, characterized in said flexible needle hub further being configured for attachment to medical fluid transfer equipment having structure to form a LUER-LOCK.RTM. type connection.

22. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 16, wherein a flexible needle hub is configured for attachment to medical fluid transfer equipment by an attachment structure to form a connection generally perpendicular to a direction of flexible needle insertion.

23. (Previously presented) The flexible spinal needle assembly of claim 16, wherein said flexible needle comprises a kink sleeve disposed on a portion thereof, said kink sleeve configured to prevent kinking of said flexible needle when said flexible needle is bent during use.

24. (Canceled).

25. (Previously presented) A flexible spinal needle comprising: a flexible needle body comprising an elongated hollow tube, said flexible needle body configured to be slidably mounted on an exterior of a support needle; a kink sleeve disposed on a portion of said flexible needle body, said kink sleeve configured to prevent kinking of said flexible needle body, when said flexible needle body is bent during use.

26. (Previously presented) A flexible spinal needle comprising: a flexible needle body comprising an elongated hollow tube, said flexible needle body configured to be slidably mounted on an exterior of a support needle; a flexible needle hub configured for attachment to medical fluid transfer equipment by an attachment structure to form a connection generally perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of said flexible needle body.